

economy is largely dependent on foreign markets, and our farmers should not bear the brunt of our sanctions policy.

Another issue that must be addressed is the efficacy of the crop insurance program. Too many vulnerable farmers are not being protected under this program, and I am eager to find a way in which we can ensure the affordability of crop insurance for those at high risk, while making the program attractive to those at low risk, all at a cost the federal government can bear. I am pleased that the President's budget includes several preliminary proposals for crop insurance reforms, and I look forward to building on these initiatives to develop a system that is strong and effective.

Let me mention one more issue of critical importance to Illinois farmers, namely ethanol. The ethanol industry has generated significant economic activity throughout rural America and created thousands of high-paying U.S. jobs. At the same time, the use of ethanol has reduced air pollution, oil imports, and our trade imbalance, all at a net savings to the federal government. I am anxious to help our corn growers find new markets for ethanol. This is a product with far-reaching benefits . . . to agriculture, to our environment, and to all American consumers.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Ms. KAPTUR and Mr. STENHOLM for demonstrating their commitment to American agriculture and urging us to speak out on this important issue. I hope we can use the momentum generated today to begin solving the problems facing our agriculture economy and to ensure that the agriculture industry of which we have always been so proud in this country remains strong for generations to come.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

HON. ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, our nation's social security system has traditionally been a "safety net" to citizens hoping to lead long and fruitful lives. However, changes in our society's economic and social conditions warrant reform.

The facts are clear. The Trust Fund will be depleted by 2032.

As such, the current debate is not about the necessity of reform, but what structural revisions will preserve the system long term.

I believe that reform should be synonymous with "guarantee"—guaranteed minimum benefits for decades to come. Reforms that do not ensure system solvency or include pension or private savings plans without such a guarantee are, frankly, indefensible.

Today, I urge my colleagues to support reform that, as Franklin Roosevelt said best, ". . . take[s] care of human needs" throughout the next millennium.

TRIBUTE TO DOROTHY DARROW

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to honor Dorothy Darrow

who, for the last 30 years, has served as the Secretary of the Delta County Republican Party. In this capacity, Dorothy has won both the esteem and admiration of everyone, including myself, who has had the privilege of working with her. As Dorothy moves on from her position in the party, I would like to pay tribute to her and thank her for her many years of dedicated service.

First elected to the post of party secretary on February 7, 1969, Dorothy served with great distinction as secretary where she was chiefly responsible for coordinating and organizing the multiple activities of the local party. In doing so, Dorothy played an integral part in the success of both the party and its candidates for three decades.

Mr. Speaker, like those within the Delta Republican Party, I am truly grateful to Dorothy for her years of self-less service. She has been a wonderful asset to the local party, myself and other Republican candidates, as well as the Delta community at-large. As Dorothy ends her tenure with the Delta County Republicans, I would like to congratulate her on a job well done and wish her all the best in all of her future endeavors.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 1999

Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, during roll call vote No. 52 on H. Con. Res. 24, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted "yes."

FEDERAL RESERVE BOARD RETIREMENT PORTABILITY ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. JOE SCARBOROUGH

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 16, 1999

Mr. SCARBOROUGH. Mr. Speaker, as the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Civil Service, I was pleased to introduce H.R. 807. As amended, this legislation addresses serious problems that affect a small number of Federal Reserve employees who transfer to other federal agencies and also federal employees who move from federal agencies to the Federal Reserve. This measure also ensures that the access provision of the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 will be implemented as Congress intended it to be.

The Federal Reserve Board maintains two retirement systems of its own. Both are similar to the retirement systems that cover most federal employees. One is comparable to the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), and the other is structured like the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS).

Despite these similarities, there are also distinct differences between the Federal Reserve's programs and these federal retirement systems. One difference is how they are financed. The Federal Reserve programs are backed by real assets, stocks and bonds, that have appreciated to create a substantial cor-

pus from which benefits may be paid. In fact, the Federal Reserve's retirement fund is so over funded that it has not had to make any contributions to it since 1986. The CSRS and FERS systems, in contrast, are "invested" only in IOUs drawn on the taxpayers. Consequently, despite continuous employee and agency contributions, annuities are mainly paid from current tax revenue, and the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund is woefully under funded; its unfunded liability exceeds a half a trillion dollars.

There is also a difference between how employees who transfer between the Federal Reserve and other agencies are treated under the FERS system. Employees who transfer into the Federal Reserve receive credit under the Federal Reserve's FERS-like plan for their other federal service. But FERS does not provide reciprocal treatment to Federal Reserve employees who transfer to positions in other agencies.

Mr. Speaker, this is unfair. H.R. 807 will provide the retirement portability that is currently lacking. Under it, those employees who participate in the Federal Reserve's FERS-like retirement will receive FERS credit for their Federal Reserve years when they transfer to another federal agency. In short, this legislation provides reciprocity. Without this correction, former Federal Reserve employees would receive smaller annuities upon retirement than they otherwise should.

H.R. 807 also fixes another problem that was brought to the Civil Service Subcommittee's attention after we held a hearing on the Federal Reserve's retirement programs and marked up the bill at subcommittee. Under current law, Federal employees participating in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) who transfer to the Federal Reserve Board, are not permitted by law to withdraw funds from their TSP accounts. Current law specifies that employees "must separate from Government employment" in order to be entitled to withdraw funds. However, employment at the Board is considered to be "Government employment." Therefore, employees who transfer to the Federal Reserve and are covered by its Thrift Plan may not withdraw the funds in their TSP accounts.

I amended this bill when it was marked up by the Committee on Government Reform to correct this problem. H.R. 807 now allows Federal employees who have transferred or will transfer to the Board to move the funds in their TSP accounts to the Board's Thrift Plan. I believe that this technical correction, along with the portability language in the underlying bill, are appropriate and necessary remedies to ensure Board employees fair treatment under current law.

Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to support section 4 of this measure. Section 4 was added to the bill by my good friend from Florida, Mr. MICA, who chaired the Civil Service Subcommittee during the last two Congresses. This provision will ensure that the Administration will implement the access provision of the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 as Congress intended it to.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, OPM's interpretation of that Act undermined the very reason Congress adopted the access provision: to open competition for previously restricted jobs. OPM ruled that agencies cannot appoint veterans selected under the access provisions of that Act to the competitive service unless they